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# BEING A CHALLENGER IN A PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY: *ROMEO AND JULIET* REVISITED

**Abstract**

Producing his artistic works in a period marked by a patriarchal social structure, Shakespeare created vivid and controversial female characters that both reflected and subverted the image of women of his time in a great majority of his plays. Regardless of the genre, most women in his plays are often witty and admirably strong; sometimes unruly, disobedient, ambitious and occasionally naïve, submissive and conformist. Endowing his female characters with such multifaceted qualities, the playwright was seen as either a misogynist or proto-feminist due to the fact that he could portray women who were often incompatible with one another. After remembering the diverse representations of women in his various works and how his female characters, from submissive figures to strong, rebellious ones, embody both compliance with and resistance to societal expectations, the article posits that Shakespeare's depictions of women, as both victims and assertive challengers, reflect his intricate understanding of gender dynamics, highlighting the resilience and intellect of his female characters amidst a rigidly patriarchal society. While not a feminist by contemporary standards, Shakespeare's empathetic portrayals suggest a proto-feminist sensitivity through his female characters who challenge male authority in subtle but powerful ways. This study aims to revisit Shakespeare's portrayal of Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet* to demonstrate that the playwright had a proto-feminist attitude and attempted to establish a balance between his time's cultural codes and his humanist/individual self despite the patriarchal culture he belonged to.

**Keywords**: Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare's female characters, proto-feminist, patriarchal society

## ATAERKİL BİR TOPLUMDA MEYDAN OKUYUCU OLMAK:

## *ROMEO VE JULIET* OYUNUNA YENİDEN BAKIŞ

**Öz**

Ataerkil toplumsal yapının baskın olduğu bir dönemde eserlerini üreten Shakespeare, oyunlarının büyük çoğunluğunda döneminin kadın imgesini hem yansıtan hem de altüst eden canlı ve tartışmalı kadın karakterler yaratmıştır. Türü ne olursa olsun, oyunlarındaki kadınların çoğu genellikle esprili ve hayranlık uyandıracak kadar güçlü; bazen asi, itaatsiz, hırslı, bazen de naif, itaatkâr ve kurallara uyan kişilerdir. Kadın karakterlerini böylesine çok yönlü niteliklerle donatan oyun yazarı, çoğu zaman birbirinden farklı kadınlar çizdiği için kadın düşmanı ya da tam tersine feminist duyarlığı olan biri olarak görülmüştür. Bu çalışma, itaatkâr figürlerden güçlü, isyankâr olanlara kadar Shakespeare'in çeşitli eserlerindeki farklı kadın karakterlerinin toplumsal beklentilere uyumunu ve direnişini nasıl somutlaştırdığını hatırlattıktan sonra, yazarın kadınları hem kurban hem de iddialı meydan okuyucular olarak tasvir etmesinin, ataerkil bir toplumda kadın karakterlerinin direncini ve zekâsını vurgulayarak toplumsal cinsiyet dinamiklerine dair anlayışını yansıttığını göstermeye çalışmaktadır. Çağdaş standartlara göre bir feminist olmasa da Shakespeare'in duygudaşlık içeren kadın tasvirleri, erkek otoritesine meydan okuyan kadın karakterleri aracılığıyla yazarın proto-feminist duyarlılığına işaret eder. Bu çalışma, Shakespeare'in *Romeo ve Juliet* oyunundaki Juliet karakterini yeniden ele alarak, oyun yazarının proto-feminist bir tutuma sahip olduğunu ve ait olduğu ataerkil kültüre rağmen döneminin kültürel kodları ile hümanist/bireysel benliği arasında bir denge kurmaya çalıştığını göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Shakespeare, *Romeo ve Juliet*, Shakespeare'in kadın karakterleri, proto-feminist, ataerkil toplum

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## Introduction

Shakespeare lived and wrote in an age of ambivalence. He was a product of the Renaissance age, informed by the notion of humanism, which still carried the traces of the Medieval period characterized by feudal codes. He was leading a life in a Protestant country which still bore the marks of Catholicism. More importantly, at a time when English society was thoroughly patriarchal, he spent thirty-nine of his fifty-two years under the reign of a female monarch. Yet, one should ask whether even a powerful female monarch like Queen Elizabeth I would have the capacity to change the fabric of a patriarchal social structure as a woman who had declared in her speech to the Troops at Tilbury in 1588 that she had the "body of a weak and feeble woman; but […] the heart and stomach of a king […]" (Royal Museums Greenwich). Or we can even ask whether she ever thought to change this male-dominant picture in which she very skilfully played the role of a powerful male.

Creating most of his artistic works during the reign of a powerful female monarch, Shakespeare's vivid and controversial female characters both reflected and subverted the image of women of his time in a great majority of his plays. Regardless of the genre, most women in his plays are often witty and admirably strong. At times, they are unruly, disobedient, and ambitious, while at other times, they appear naïve, submissive, and conformist. The playwright received mixed criticisms like being a misogynist or proto-feminist

because he could portray women who were often incompatible with one another. A submissive daughter like Ophelia, a rebel like Juliet or Hermia and a genius like Portia belong to the same imaginative mind. This study aims to revisit Shakespeare's portrayal of Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet* to show that although Shakespeare was a part of his cultural milieu and patriarchal ideology, still he had a proto-feminist attitude and attempted to establish a balance between his time's cultural codes and his humanist/individual self.

## 1. Women in Early Modern England

England was full of contradictions during the Renaissance times. On the one hand, there was a queen who ruled the country for forty-four years, administering many cunning and skilful statesmen around her; on the other, there was a highly patriarchal social structure preceded by a painful transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. In an age full of controversies, concepts and situations interacted in a complex interplay and the situation of women was a part of this contradictory picture.

As Russ McDonald explains in his illustrative study *The Bedford Companion to Shakespeare. An Introduction with Documents*, during the Renaissance, there were two areas that could be considered as professions for women: being a housewife and mother. While women took on the tasks of running the house and bringing up children, upper-class women could have servants to help with these tasks. Women of lower classes had to do all the work themselves. Only a small proportion of wealthy women could take part in leisure activities (2001: 259-260). During this period, women were seen in a subordinate position to men. The difference in physical strength created a division of labour between the sexes, and this understanding was accepted as an unquestionable truth by the thinkers of the time. Men's physical strength was associated with intellectual ability and emotional depth, while women were thought to be appropriate for domestic roles. McDonald also sheds light on Aristotle's explanations of biological sex and the theories of temperament based on the doctrine of the four elements by the surgeon and philosopher Galen, one of the most notable physicians of ancient Rome and Greece who reinforced the idea that women were inferior to men. Each of the elements - air, earth, water and fire - was associated with one of the body fluids: sanguine (blood), phlegmatic (phlegm), choleric (choler) and melancholic (black bile). The warmer elements were associated with masculinity. However, partly due to the phenomenon of menstruation, women were thought to be less able than men to keep the elements in balance in their bodies. From ancient times, through the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance, the physical differences between men and women created a hierarchy that was universally and decidedly accepted. Men's physical strength was associated with greater intellectual ability and a deeper capacity for emotion. Such constructions of male and female abilities and roles led to an unquestioning acceptance of male dominance. Women were thought to be less able than men to maintain their biological balance, and this difference shaped the social hierarchy.

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These pseudoscientific justifications were supported by both the Catholic and Protestant Churches, legitimising male dominance. In addition to all this, the lack of reliable contraception at the time meant that women were forced to bear children and remain tied to home and family life. These traditional roles of women were further reinforced by moralists to maintain social stability by transforming them into an ideology of obedience and domestic responsibility. Since during the Tudor period it was the Monarch who had the absolute power, the influence of feudal families and the lords who ruled them decreased, yet in Renaissance England, still authority in the family was vested in the father. Women had authority over children and servants, but the principle that women were weak and therefore dependent on the superior judgement and ability of their husbands gave the father/husband an unquestionable dominance over his wife and all members of the household (McDonald, 2001: 253-259).

Despite the absolute power men had during the Renaissance period, Juliet Dusinberre argues in her book entitled *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women*: "Shakespeare saw men and women as equal in a world which declared them unequal. He did not divide human nature into the masculine and the feminine but observed in the individual woman or man an infinite variety of unions between opposing impulses" (1996: 308). In other words, in Shakespeare's worldview men and women were equal even though members of the society would never approve of this. He saw a distinct fusion of opposing urges in every person, male or female, rather than classifying human characteristics as exclusively masculine or feminine. Another critical point is that as Stephen Greenblatt points out, Shakespeare as a playwright is "the embodiment of human freedom. He seems to have been able to fashion language to say anything he imagined, to conjure up any character, to express any emotion, to explore any idea" (2010: 1). Having a remarkable ability to shape language to convey anything he envisioned, it is likely that he fashioned language in his portrayal of female characters as well.

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Without doubt, considering Shakespeare a feminist would mean assessing his plays in an anachronistic way given that the concept of feminism or gender equality was absent at that time. No matter their class, economic and social status, women could not be situated on an equal scale with men due to their gender in Shakespeare's lifetime. Of course, this unequal social position of women dates back to classical times stretching to the Medieval Period and Early Modern England making them be seen as the property first of their fathers and then their husbands, as daughters, wives and mothers. And Shakespeare was an actor, a playwright, a poet, a son, a husband and a father at such a time. As elaborated by Ayşegül Yüksel:

> we should keep in mind the contradiction that while in Shakespeare's time, the generally accepted model for the ideal woman was that of the loving and obedient wife, the good mother and house manager, England was on its way towards becoming the leading country in Europe under the rule of Queen Elizabeth, a mighty female with a powerful mind. This double standard

concerning the definition of women did not seem to disturb the male-dominated world, however, so long as the wives were kept where they ought to be (2014: 30).

Taking the picture in Early Modern England into consideration, it would be hardly plausible to label Shakespeare as a dramatist who struggled for women's rights or gender equality in the modern sense. Hence, feminist critics also criticised those who tried to label Shakespeare as a feminist believing it to be an attempt to idealize the playwright. As Claire McEachern relates, such critics contend that Shakespeare has never been free of his culture; on the contrary, he is stuck and locked within it making him a supporter of this very patriarchal culture (1988: 270). However, as Coppélia Kahn argues Shakespeare

> [...] lived as a man in Elizabethan times and knew at first hand at least some of the male anxieties and fantasies he depicts. Moreover, he lived in a patriarchal society that exacerbated male anxieties about identity. Though he accepts conventional arguments for patriarchy, perhaps because he sees no preferable alternative, he objects to the extreme polarization of sex roles and the contradiction underlying it. [...] Shakespeare's works reflect and voice a masculine anxiety about the uses of patriarchal power over women, specifically about men's control over women's sexuality, which arises from the disparity between men's social dominance and their peculiar emotional vulnerability to women. (1981: 12).

As Kahn observes, Shakespeare's personal experience as a man in Elizabethan society influenced his portrayal of male anxieties in his plays. Living in a patriarchal culture, he recognized the intense pressure on men to establish their identities within restrictive gender roles. While he accepted certain aspects of patriarchy, perhaps due to limited alternatives, he critiqued its extreme gender divisions. His work reflects a deep male fear of patriarchal power over women, especially regarding the control over women's sexuality. This fear stems from the contradiction between men's social dominance and their emotional dependence on women.

## 2. Shakespeare's Multifaceted Representations of the Female

Shakespeare's portrayal of women is complex and varied. As a Renaissance playwright who was brought up with the ideals of English Reformation veiled by Catholicism, who was educated at Grammar School with a curriculum focussing on humanities and who had the intuition of observing the fact that the Renaissance was still hand in hand with Medieval codes of politics, culture and morality, he seems to have embraced all these ambivalences. If we accept the assumption that theatre is an imitation or mirror of life, Shakespeare's treatment of women in this mirror creates the impression that the playwright tries to reconfigure the female image rather than having a one-to-one representation. His characterization and reconfiguration of women inevitably rely on the genre. In other words, in spite of an attempt

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to create female characters who threaten authority and patriarchy, the unavoidability of the death of women in tragedies comes as an outcome of the tragic genre. In comedies, thanks to various methods Shakespeare deploys such as intentional disguise, the existence of supernatural events and/or performativity, females are saved. Thus, although the playwright tries to avoid the reinforcement of patriarchal ideology which annihilates the lives of his female characters, he cannot avoid death of women (as well as men) in tragedies while in comedies, he explicitly or implicitly celebrates female power. As opposed to radical feminists' conviction that Shakespeare was a misogynist or a playwright who endorsed patriarchal narratives, it can be seen that even though he was a product of this male-dominant culture himself, he succeeded in at least freeing some of his female characters from the hands of patriarchy. He was ahead of his time in terms of his theatrical capabilities, and his intellectual and philosophical depth led him to go beyond the limits of his time's social norms in the representation of women on page and stage and he depicted such women who were obviously far wiser and skilful than their male counterparts and who, bravely and cleverly, challenged authority.

At this stage, it may be useful to look at the portrayal of Shakespeare's female characters in general. Readers and audiences alike can remember well that Juliet, Ophelia, Cordelia and Desdemona set off on their journeys to a tragic end because of their fathers or lovers/husbands who see women as their own property and symbols of the family's chastity. From these four women, while Juliet and Cordelia rebel against their father in their unique ways, Ophelia and Desdemona are depicted as vulnerable and naïve; they are exposed to intimidation first by their fathers and then their loved ones/husbands; hence the former goes mad and most probably commits suicide while the latter cannot escape suffocation by her husband, Othello. And it should not go unnoticed that the fathers, husbands or tragic heroes in each play can also be regarded as sometimes conscious and sometimes unconscious agents of the patriarchal society each being a cultural and political product of their time. Ophelia's father sees her as a property whose chastity is to be protected as it is what he has witnessed from his own father and the rest of the male community. Hamlet, after he becomes enraged learning that Ophelia has collaborated with King Claudius and Queen Gertrude, treats her brutally and intimidates her using offensive words generalizing all women with their so-called frailty. Although Hamlet has a higher intellectual level than most Shakespearean tragic heroes, he is unable to get rid of the patriarchal codes of identity. As for Cordelia, she is harassed by her father not because of being seen as an emblem of chastity but because of Lear's fetishism with possession and power. Although Shakespeare allows Cordelia to get free from the oppression of her father and monstrous sisters, it occurs not as an outcome of her struggles but due to her marriage to the King of France. Another female character who is victimized first by her father and then by her husband is Desdemona. In *Othello*, Shakespeare presents us with a darker and more brutal representation of female subordination. In all these tragedies, there

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are common denominators to highlight in terms of the depiction of women. Female characters such as Ophelia, Cordelia, and Desdemona, who lack maternal guidance at the outset, appear to endure greater suffering throughout the plays. And more importantly, these plays end up with a sense of self-realization on the part of the intimidators. Mr Capulet, Hamlet, King Lear and Othello are seen to suffer and repent for what they have done. Manifestations of repentance, regret and remorse, although they arrive too late, at least create the impression of Shakespeare's empathy with the female characters who have deeply suffered.

As it has been mentioned, the way Shakespeare shapes his female characters not only relies on the historical and social context but also the generic mode. In his comedies and romances, his female characters are often more intelligent, skilful and practical than their male counterparts. It is known that Shakespeare violated the rule of purity of genre and most of the time his comedies and romances have tragic potential. Females in many of them overcome the atrocities of male dominance by way of intentional disguise, hiding identities, performativity or supernatural elements. Again, in comedies and romances, fathers and/or husbands subordinate women and harass them. Hermia and many other females in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Hermione in *The Winter's Tale*, Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*, Imogen in *Cymbeline* and Katharina in *The Taming of the Shrew* are all confined by the norms of patriarchal world order, but they challenge the male authority and defy subordination in their own way. For example, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the female is oppressed not only in the first space, that is Athens, but also in the second space, the forest, the land of fairies and henceforth a supernatural space. While Hermione in *The Winter's Tale* and Imogen in *Cymbeline* are both devastated because of their husbands' jealousy just like Desdemona, the former survives as a consequence of female solidarity and a miraculous reanimation, the latter sees a happy end through the help of her servant and disguise. As for Katharina of *The Taming of the Shrew*, although she does not experience a life-threatening situation and although she is the one who is supposed to be tamed by her husband, she seems to have tamed her husband at the end.

### 3. *Romeo and Juliet*

After recalling Shakespeare's representations of women in general, this section of the study will focus on the dramatist's portrayal of Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet* both as a victim imprisoned in the patriarchal order and a challenger trying to overcome this order. From this vantage point, it can be seen that while Shakespeare reflects the cultural codes of his period in the play, he also holds a critical mirror to the destructive effect of these codes and the male-dominated system. Francois Laroque states that in this play "[y]oung Shakespeare seems to have delighted in delineating the ravages of misrule, of the hurly-burly of love and desire, in a traditional aristocratic society dominated by custom, patriarchy, and well-established wealth" (1995: 19). In such a society, Romeo and Juliet try to challenge social norms and get

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free from all sorts of restraints which lead to chaos. Once order is disrupted, it is always restored at the end and restoration of order comes only when Romeo and Juliet are victimized.

Shakespeare in *Romeo and Juliet* revisits the well-known story of the "star-crossed lovers" in an appealing way and he achieves this by a masterful use of poetic language, plot, metaphors and mythological references. Yet, this romantic love story goes through a sort of metamorphosis in the hands of Shakespeare. According to Thomas E. Wartenberg, who sees the play as a social critique, "[t]he distinctive feature of Romeo and Juliet as a social drama is its criticism of feudal society's patriarchal household for its failure to support romantic love" (2022: 448). As Wartenberg argues in the article, Shakespeare challenges the patriarchal social rules legitimised by the feudal system. In such a system, apart from the father, who is the head of the family in the feudal order, the male child has no name either, as we see in the case of Romeo. Juliet, who will soon be fourteen, is only thirteen years old, while Romeo is two or three years older than her. Romeo and Juliet, whom we regard as adolescents from the current perspective, are seen in the text as adults who already reached the age of marriage. As Lawrence Stone points out, among the propertied classes in sixteenth-century England, marriage was not an individual but a joint decision of family and relatives (1977: 87). Marriage was therefore a mutual agreement in which an economic and class balance was sought to ensure the continuation of future generations. The idea of matrimony as a pact infiltrates the whole play and is one of the core dynamics that turns romantic love into tragedy.

We see this perception of marriage at the beginning of the play when the noble Paris expresses his intention to marry Juliet (who has not yet met Romeo). Paris obviously saw this marriage as a good deal based on economy and class. The interesting thing is that in the scene where Paris announces his intention to marry Juliet for the first time, Mr Capulet draws the image of a father who is far from the feudal mentality and cares for his daughter's wishes, while Paris compares Juliet with those girls who are younger than her and have already become happy mothers:

> CAPULET
>
> But saying o'er what I have said before.
>
> My child is yet a stranger in the world:
>
> She hath not seen the change of fourteen years.
>
> Let two more summers wither in their pride
>
> Ere we may think her ripe to be a bride.
>
> PARIS
>
> Younger than she are happy mothers made.

CAPULET

And too soon marred are those so early made.

The earth hath swallowed all my hopes but she:

She is the hopeful lady of my earth.

But woo her, gentle Paris, get her heart.

My will to her consent is but a part. (I, ii, 7-17)

Mr Capulet, who avoids intimate communication with his daughter, gives his wife the task of convincing Juliet to think of this proposal. As a woman who has walked the same path, Mrs Capulet is as faithful to marriage traditions and patriarchal norms as her husband. She opens the subject of Paris to her daughter as follows:

LADY CAPULET

Well, think of marriage now. Younger than you,

Here in Verona, ladies of esteem,

Are made already mothers. By my count,

I was your mother much upon these years

That you are now a maid.

Thus then in brief:

The valiant Paris seeks you for his love. (I, iii, 69-74)

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Juliet's mother has obviously internalised the patriarchal structure and the social rules it imposes to such an extent that she believes a young woman's duty is to marry and read her husband like a book: "Read o'er the volume of young Paris' face / And find delight writ there with beauty's pen. / […] This precious book of love, this unbound lover, / To beautify him only lacks a cover. / […] So shall you share all that he doth possess / By having him, making yourself no less" (I, iii, 81-94). As we can see, in this phenomenon called "the book of love", which Mrs Capulet tries to romanticise in the eyes of her daughter, the man is identified with the book as the epitome of intellectuality and wisdom. The woman, on the other hand, is in an inferior position, in need of knowledge and learning; Lady Capulet defines Paris as a good book for which Juliet will serve as the "cover". Love has thus become a matter of corporation.

Juliet's nurse, who has mothered and breastfed her and who is a loyal defender of the patriarchal system, believes that "women grow by men" (I, iii, 95). Growing by men signifies not only maturation but also pregnancy. In this respect, it can be seen that childbirth, which is a trait that men cannot have, can be a great power for women, but even this is turned against women in the patriarchal system. Most probably, Juliet would marry Paris, be a dutiful wife

and a caring mother internalising a patriarchal way of like just like her mother if there were no Romeo. In Act I, Scene 3, her innocent response to Mrs Capulet's inquiry regarding Paris's interest in her and whether she would like him is significant in indicating the impending tragic conclusion. This is further emphasised by Juliet's subsequent realisation that mere looking will not bring love, but the impending tragedy. Immediately following her falling in love with Romeo, she begins to question social roles and codes with a maturity that is not expected from a thirteen-year-old girl. As Paul A. Kottman explicates, "Romeo and Juliet is the drama of a struggle for individual freedom and self-realization" (2012: 5). We witness Juliet's epiphanic moments in Act II, Scene 2, when like a linguist and philosopher, she reflects on the ontological meaning of social identity associated with one's surname: "What's Montague? / It is nor hand nor foot, / Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part / Belonging to a man. O be some other name. / What's in a name? That which we call a rose / By any other name would smell as sweet" (II, ii, 40-44).

Juliet's sincerity and readiness to deny her name/identity for love was not something expected from young girls in Renaissance England. According to Juliet Dusinberre, chaste women in Shakespeare's plays are not experts in the rules of chaste behaviour (1996: 71). Juliet's openness in declaring her love for Romeo and her humble and modest expression reflect her honesty. However, her honesty to Romeo and herself will not prevent the rapid development of events. Although Paris's proposal has already been approved in Mr Capulet's mind, he does not force his daughter's hand at first, as seen in his earlier conversation with Paris. However, soon he suddenly changes his mind and on behalf of Juliet, he agrees to the marriage as he is sure that "she will be ruled in all respects" by him (III, iv, 13-14). Thus, Mr Capulet, without any need to talk to Juliet again, treats his daughter as a commodity and announces Paris the day of their marriage.

What is the reason for this sudden change of Mr Capulet, who at the beginning of the play says to Paris that it would be better for his daughter to see two more springs, that is, to wait until she is fifteen years old, and that he will support this marriage only if Juliet wants it? It is likely that since Capulet never thinks of the possibility of a young girl in the feudal order opposing a marriage approved by her father, he does not even think that his thirteen-year-old daughter will oppose him and reject someone like Paris. This reaction of a feudal father who says "Day, night, late, early, / At home, abroad, alone, in company, / Waking or sleeping, still my care hath been / To have her matched" (III, v, 176-179) is an expected situation considering the conditions of that day. Throughout the play and especially in this scene, the materialistic expressions used by Capulet to describe Juliet and her position reveal how a woman, regardless of her class, was seen during the Renaissance period. A girl who is seen as her father's property is accepted in the family as long as she obeys the rules of the patriarchy; a girl who deviates from her father's law-like rules is doomed to beg on the streets according to Capulet: "An you be mine, I'll give you to my friend—/ An you be not, hang! Beg! Starve! Die

in the streets! / For, by my soul, I'll ne'er acknowledge thee, / Nor what is mine shall never do thee good. / Trust to't. Bethink you. I'll not be forsworn" (III, v, 192-196).

From the point of view of Shakespeare's representations of women, one of the main dynamics of this play is that Juliet does not submit to social and even political norms when she learns that Romeo is a Montague; on the contrary, she remains firmly attached to her feelings. It is seen that "Shakespeare has portrayed not only typical feudal women bound up by obedience to the male, but also females that have been going through the painful process of becoming modern women, who are free to decide about their lives" (Yüksel 2014: 30). Juliet is undoubtedly one of these women. In a way, we witness Juliet's transition from a little girl into maturity. As Marjorie Garber states, this naïve girl of almost fourteen years old turns into a "clever strategist" (2004: 205) after falling in love with Romeo. When her nanny, who nursed and raised her and whom she took as her mother, shows her feudal face by advising her to forget her love for Romeo and convince herself to love Paris, the guileless Juliet at the beginning of the play is long gone; she will no longer listen to the words of her parents and the Nurse based on unquestioned accepted norms; for her the Nurse is no longer the compassionate nanny but a "fiend" (III, v, 236).

As Paul A. Kottman argues in his article, the love affair of Romeo and Juliet "[i]s the story of two individuals who actively claim their separate individuality, their own freedom […]. Their love affair demonstrates that their separateness or individuation is not an imposed, external necessity, but the operation of their freedom and self-realization" (2012: 6). Thus, both Romeo and Juliet are two individuals asserting their unique identities and personal freedom. Their relationship reveals that their individuality is not a constraint imposed from the outside but an expression of their autonomy and self-fulfilment. In this respect, the transformation Juliet goes through is quite observable. Having been notified by her mother about her wedding date which had been set by her father and Paris, Juliet decidedly declares: "Now by Saint Peter's Church, and Peter too, / He shall not make me there a joyful bride" (III, v, 116-117). When Juliet informs her father of her decision soon, a vehement reaction comes from Mr Capulet: "How? Will she none? Doth she not give us thanks? / Is she not proud? Doth she not count her blest, / Unworthy as she is, that we have wrought / So worthy a gentleman to be her bridegroom?" (III, v, 142-145). For Mr Capulet, it is inconceivable that Juliet does not want to marry a noble young man like Paris because she is already "unworthy" due to her gender. Keith Thomas states that in the feudal social order, a female heiress who turns out to be unchaste is deprived of her inheritance, but a male heir is not. With a similar discourse, Capulet's threats of beating Juliet, disowning her and making her crawl in the streets will not affect the young girl who is blinded by love:

CAPULET

[…] Mistress minion you,

Thank me no thankings, nor proud me no prouds,

But fettle your fine joints 'gainst Thursday next

To go with Paris to Saint Peter's Church,

Or I will drag thee on a hurdle thither.

Out, you green sickness carrion! Out, you baggage! (III, v, 151-156)

In spite of the Renaissance conventions that sanctified the male and the father, Juliet is wise enough to overcome her identity crisis and succeeds in freeing herself from all social constraints, but she cannot escape the outcomes of cruel fate. Although Shakespeare does his best to liberate Juliet and to make her cry out on behalf of Elizabethan women by presenting to his male-dominated audience a woman's potential to break free from her chains, he cannot save her from the inevitable end of tragedy. Although the tragic deaths of the young couple end the enmity between the two families and bring peace to Verona, the 'materialistic' and 'feudal' face of love has not changed for both fathers. Even though they are devastated by the death of their children, they try to compensate for their losses through material means at the end of the play by building the golden statues of their children. With this decision and the death of the "star-crossed lovers", chaos ends, order is restored, and Romeo and Juliet's love and deaths are eternalized.

**Conclusion**

As a Renaissance playwright Shakespeare bore the sensibility of humanistic ideals as a natural outcome of the fact that writers are historical, cultural and political human beings, while he mirrored the situation of women of his age, in a majority of his plays he went beyond the boundaries of his time's cultural codes and achieved to establish an emphatic bond with women, which makes him a proto-feminist.

In *Romeo and Juliet*, we witness the maturation of Juliet from a naïve, submissive girl to a rebellious challenger. Although she goes through an identity crisis for a short time just like Romeo, she overcomes it and defies all sorts of oppression the society imposes upon her. In this well-known story of lovers who cannot get united, Shakespeare had no chance to change the fatal ending, but it is obvious that he could not ignore the effects of the atrocities of the patriarchal system on women.

Although the Renaissance was marked by the rise of humanistic ideals with human beings at the centre, women were exempt from the effects of humanism and still marginalized no matter their class, age and race. In the play, the female body and virginity are constantly emphasised as part of social norms. The biblical idea that a woman is made from the ribs of a man turns the female gender, which is seen as the weaker sex in society, into a property of men. When Juliet is forced to marry Paris, her father Capulet sees her as property and uses

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marriage as a means of maintaining the status of the family. Juliet's body is under her father's control and her free will is disregarded. Her relationship with Romeo is a rebellion against this mechanism of control, and although this rebellion ends tragically, the efforts Juliet takes to question and defy unquestionable norms and the whole process of her challenging patriarchy should be foregrounded.

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